14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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764 The same day the stalk of the wild rice is swished all over the house and premises where the body lay after death, and is then put on the grave. The grave may be inside the house, or close to it outside. In the latter case it is plastered over with mud, and thorny branches are laid on it, or a cane-stalk fence is built round it, as the hungry hyena is ever near.

THE CLOSE OF THE MOURNING

765 After the burial the people eat little food for several days. Then some near friend comes and tells them that we all must die and urges them to cheer up.

The period of mourning varies. It may be from five to six months for a man and probably two months or more for a woman or child. A longer period of mourning is customary for a chief or his family.

When in mourning the hair is shaved off and it is not again cut or bleached until the period of mourning is over. No ornaments are worn. A rope is worn round the waist.

Word is sent to all the relatives that the period of mourning is to be finished upon a certain day. They come, sometimes from a long distance. The women pound dura and bring water.

A good friend of the family is master of the ceremony. This man brings lumps of earth to make a new fireplace. He makes a fire. He puts an earthen pot (a new one if possible) over the fire and puts dura mush on to cook. The women stir it.

The friend takes a spear in his left hand and a piece of grass in his right and walks up and down between the people and the food. He beseeches the god that this sorrow may pass. If the deceased is a woman or child, no spear is carried.

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765

Sometimes this ceremony may be continued for hours. If the master of ceremony is tired another may relieve him for awhile. But when the ceremony is finished he dishes up the food himself. After all are served and have finished eating he cleans up the place, removing the fire and everything pertaining to it.

When all is clean he takes a clean half-gourd and sprinkles people, village, and houses with the water. The house of the dead person is sprinkled inside.

After this ceremony the ornaments may be resumed and the hair may be either cut or bleached. Now the mourners may attend dances again to which they have not been allowed to go during this period.

If the deceased has been murdered all the ornaments are not taken off and no rope is worn about the waist, but the rest of these customs are followed.

582 marriage ceremony with partners selected for the purpose, and, in the ceremony, the role of the sexes is reversed.(1)

BURIAL

764 The grave is dug and the corpse buried as quickly as possible and without ceremony. Young people and age-mates of the deceased do not participate. The grave site is at the left-hand side of a man's hut. All ornaments are removed and the body is buried in a flexed position, one arm being placed under the head and the other over it. The body lies on the right side facing west. Graves are not long remembered, and are not places for ritual. When a leopard-skin chief or a *wut ghok* dies he is buried on a platform and covered with skins.

A few days after death, the *gwan buthni*, the ritual expert of the lineage, makes a sacrifice and cleanses the people of the homestead. The ghost *(joak)* is told not to trouble the living. Some believe that spirits live in the sky, others that they continue to live under the earth the same kind of life as they lived when alive.(2)

●765 Relatives mourn until the mortuary ceremony which is held several months after death. The purpose of this ceremony, the *wocene cuol* or *cuol woc*, is to prevent misfortune which might befall the relatives on account of the death and to cut off the dead from the living.

THE BURUN

000 GENERAL

The Burun inhabit the regions between the White and Blue Niles in the province of Dar Fung. The country is a flat plain, with rocky hills emerging from it. These jebels are in some cases of considerable size and, wherever there is water in or near them, they have settlements on them. The populations of the hills have been considerably affected by foreign influence over a long period of time and, as a consequence, are very mixed. The Burun-speaking peoples may be divided into two groups:

The Northern Burun, comprising the settlements on hills Maiak, Surkum, Jerok, Mufwa, Kurmuk, Kudul, Ragreig, Abuldugu, Mughaja, and Tullok;

The Southern Burun, comprising the Meban of the southern plains, the dwellers on hills Ulu and Gerwai and the Jumjum on hills Tunya, Terta, Wadega and along Khor Jukjum.

The following account is a brief summary of the information available on the social organisation, cultural features and ritual beliefs and practices of the Burun-speaking people. Each hill community is treated separately for, according to the authorities, each is entirely independent of the rest. Most of the information available is contained in Evans-Pritchard's article in S.N.R., 1932, Vol.XV, Pt.I.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Uganda Journal*, 1936, Vol.III, No.3, p.233.
(2) Evans-Pritchard, *African Affairs*, 1949, Vol.48, p.57.

764 in front of the dead man's hut. He also addresses the ghost and
782 tells him that he has been taken away and must turn his face to the ground and not trouble the living: 'friend, this (beast) is yours (for you). Now turn yourself to the ghosts. Turn yourself away from us. Death was not made by us in old times, it was made by God, friend. Do not trouble your people with bad dreams but regard us favourably. God has not entirely destroyed you, for there are those who come after you; you have children left behind you.' If the family have no animal to sacrifice the master of ceremonies sacrifices by cutting in two a wild cucumber. 'The half of the living, the half of the children, the right half, remains outside, being placed in the thatch of the hut. The half of the dead man is thrown into the bush.' With it is thrown out of the village the contagion of death. They say of this sacrifice '*ba kier piny ka del*', '(the dead man) is expiated in the earth with a goat', and that the badness goes into the earth with the blood and the chyme.

● 765 Members of the family mourn till the mortuary ceremony has been held some months after death. They shave their heads after the burial but then they do not shave them again, neither do they treat the hair with ashes nor depilate their bodies, till the period of mourning is ended. They also remove all ornaments, and the closest relatives wear a *dep liath*, a mourning cord of grass, around their waists and necks. There are no prescribed food and sex abstentions during the period of mourning though I was told that close kin may abstain from sexual relations for a few days after death 'because they are sad and thinking of their dead friend'. Less closely related persons and the wives of kin show their respect by leaving their hair untended but for a shorter time, perhaps only a month or so. When people are in mourning they do not attend dances. People do not mourn for a small child, for
[858] 'a small child is not a person (*ran*). When he tethers the cattle and herds the goats he is a person. When he cleans the byres and spreads the dung out to dry and collects it and carries it to the fires he is a person.' A man will not say that he has a son till the
[766] child is about six years of age. A small child is buried by old women and without sacrifice.

765 Four to six months after burial the mortuary ceremony is held.
775 It is known as *wocene cuol* or *cuol woc* because its purpose is to wipe out (*woc*) the debt (*cuol*) which Nuer feel to be due on account of the death. They seem to feel that there is some mis-

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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fortune hanging over them and that the death may be only part of it. It is necessary to clear off the whole debt before any further evil comes to them. Otherwise people may cut their feet when fishing, pierce their feet when hunting, cut themselves with spears when dancing, or indeed meet with almost any misfortune, even death. Nuer also feel that if the dead is not appeased by this ceremony he may return in anger to fetch the living, especially his wives and children, and the cattle.

I have only once witnessed this ceremony, rather early in my study of the Nuer, and I have supplemented my account of what I then saw with statements made to me later. The ceremony was held at Dini in the Lou tribal area for the ghost of an important old man called Lam. When I arrived at the dead man's village towards evening the people had just sacrificed an ox outside his kraal. This sacrifice had been for Tutthiang, Lam's father, for it was known that Lam had intended before he died to sacrifice this animal in his father's honour. Next morning, before sunrise, an ox and a cow and its bull-calf were speared at their tethering-pegs in Lam's kraal. People watched to see how they fell; because if a sacrificed animal falls over cleanly on its side, especially if it falls on its right side, it is a good omen and shows that the ghost is content, whereas if it falls on its head or totters about before falling it is a bad omen. It is regarded as important that a cow still giving milk should be sacrificed for the ghost of an old man who had a position in his community lest he should feel that sufficient sacrifice had not been made. To kill a cow in milk is the greatest sacrifice a Nuer can make. An animal must be sacrificed for each wife of the dead by one of her sons or by some kinsman on behalf of her hut. If the ceremony is for a young unmarried man his favourite ox should be sacrificed. A cow should be sacrificed for a senior woman if the herd is large, and a male calf for a young woman. However, there are no hard and fast rules about the matter. The people of the home should sacrifice what they can afford, cattle if possible, but a goat or sheep if they cannot obtain at least a male calf, which is unlikely, because a man can generally borrow one from a neighbour.

At Dini after the cattle had been killed they were skinned and the meat apportioned to the various categories of kin. It is an absolute rule, however, that no member of the ghost's age-set may partake of the meat of animals sacrificed at his mortuary

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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765 782 [561] ceremony, and I was told that it is dangerous for them even to smell the cooking meat. Everyone then moved off to sit in front of a hut to listen to the commemorative orations, which are also invocations; and here were spread out on the ground the ghost's possessions, his fighting-spears and fishing-spears, his beads, his metal arm-rings, his ostrich-shell girdles, his pipe, and, since his son was senior government interpreter in the district, his clothes and whistle, articles not possessed by ordinary Nuer. At the side of these were placed the heads and hides of the cattle which had just been sacrificed. The people sat with their backs to the now rising sun and facing the direction of the setting sun because 'death follows the setting sun'. Nuer say that 'the west is the side of [823] death, the east the side of life', and the verb *kwony* in their [196] language means both 'to bury' and 'to set' (the sun). When they sacrifice an ox for a sick man they hope it will fall towards the east. The master of ceremonies (pp. 287–9) of the ghost's family made the first commemorative oration, after throwing some tobacco towards east and west. As he spoke he walked up and down in front of the people brandishing the spear with which the animals had been sacrificed. He commenced his address (*lam*) by shouting out his ox-name. He must also have shouted out his clan spear-name, though I have not recorded it in my notebooks.

I did not take down his address at the time but I was told later that a master of ceremonies speaks in this wise: 'God, now thou hast given us badness, or is it simply the lot of creation? [Is the death thou hast sent us a special evil designed for us or has the dead man merely suffered what soon or late comes to all created things?] Now thou hast taken so-and-so [he names the dead man], now he has become one of thy people, turn about and take him right away. We who are left in the world, give us peace. Let his children who remain in the world be at peace. He is not finished, his children will carry on his name. In the future they will bear his name. Let no further evil befall us.' The master of ceremonies is now speaking to the ghost: 'So-and-so, my brother [or 'my father' if he was a much older man], now thou art one of God's people. Do not forget us, let it be thy habit to speak [on our behalf] to thy father [God]. When we go into the bush let us tread on wild rice [avoid all dangers and troubles]. Let us beget children. May all evil be taken away from us now, and may we remain in peace.' The master of ceremonies again addresses God: 'God, and

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you ghosts! Thou, God, madest man and thou also madest death. [Thou hast said] thou, man, I made thee only that thou mightest perish. God, it is thy world. Thou hast shown us death this year. Now we here, we go about with this debt, there has been no laughing with happiness for us this year; thou hast given us mourning. God, turn about and take away the man thou hast taken. Breathe on us with favourable breath (*ku ko ngok ni yiegh me goagh*). Thou hast taken this man, take also this ox of his together with him.' He addresses the ghost once more: 'and thou, so-and-so, art thou now in the great cattle camp [community] of the dead? Where art thou, our father? Where are all the people of our home? Eh! It is the camp to which we all go at last. We who remain in the world, may we be at peace. May the children thou hast left behind thee rest in peace. Thou who hast gone before do not close thine eyes to us. Thou art a person of God. May there be nothing further bad for us to see.'

The master of ceremonies spoke for a long time in this vein and when he had finished five senior kinsmen made similar orations, one after another, the six addresses taking over four hours to deliver. The kinsmen harangued the ghost. They told him that when his daughters were married he would receive the finest cows of their bridewealth. They asked him to be a good ghost and not to trouble his kinsmen. They frequently admonished him to turn away from them (*ku ro du rit*). They wanted the ghost to look away from them and not to trouble them. His kinship (*mar*) was now with God and not with men. This request to turn away, made to both God and the ghost of the dead man, is a constant refrain in mortuary ceremonies. In a text given by Professor Westerman, the translation of which I have slightly emended, the speaker says on such an occasion, 'Oh God, why dost thou pursue us? Why dost thou pursue us? Turn thyself away, take this thy man and go; let him be sufficient; do not look at us again! In what are we at fault?' And also 'Oh God, take thy cow! And thou [the dead man] turn away! Turn thy face away into the bush! Do not look at us again! We have given thee thine own things, but then leave us alone!'[1] The kinsmen at Dini also told the ghosts that if they must give them something bad they should give them hunger and not sickness and death. They pointed out to the dead man that his age-mates were present to honour him. They implored God

[1] Op. cit., pp. 117–18.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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765 that they might sleep quietly and their souls be 'cool' (*koce thei*).
782 Their remarks also contained many reflections on life and human destiny and the transience of all living things, and they recounted the deeds of the dead and reiterated that he had left sons to carry
[627] on his name and lineage. Speakers and listeners also stated any grievances they had in their hearts towards kinsmen, for any of the kin of the dead man who bears a grudge against a relative must now declare it. If he does not do so now, he must for ever keep silence. This is an occasion for amicable settlement of family and kinship quarrels. Thus at this ceremony the senior wife of Mayan, the eldest son of the dead man, complained that her cow had been given by her husband to his second wife. A wife of the dead man who had gone to live with another man, taking her daughter with her, said that she wished now to live at her dead husband's home, and cattle of her bridewealth which had been returned were sent back again to her people on the day of the ceremony.

765 A part of the ceremony I did not see, for it was taking place elsewhere during these orations, was the preparation of porridge and beer. The master of ceremonies makes three new clay fire-stones, places on them a new pot, and pours water into the pot. He then puts out the old fire in the dead man's homestead, throws its ashes and fire-stones into the bush, and starts a new fire under the pot. He begins the mixing and stirring of the porridge. When the women have cooked the porridge he ladles it out with a new gourd-ladle into a new gourd-dish. All the utensils are new for the occasion. The porridge and a pot of beer were now carried to where we were sitting, and as each of the later speakers rose to make his speech he dipped a gourd-ladle into the pot of beer and poured a libation to the ground.

When the last speech was finished everyone stood up and the master of ceremonies dipped wild rice into a gourdful of milk and aspersed the people with it. He did this many times till everyone had been aspersed. He then sprinkled the dead man's possessions and poured what was left of the milk at the side of a tethering-peg over the dung which had been spread out to dry, and knelt down and kneaded the milk with the dung. I was told that the cattle and huts were also aspersed with milk. I believe that milk is only used in this rite if the dead man was, like Lam, 'a man of the cattle' (pp. 300–2). In the case of a leopard-skin priest water

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mixed with blood is used. For ordinary people water is used. Then butter was brought out in a small gourd and was smeared on the backs and chests of those present and on the dead man's spears. Those who were wearing mourning cords came forward and the master of ceremonies cut them from their waists and necks and carried them into the bush and threw them away. Afterwards the porridge was distributed and eaten.

The master of ceremonies now began to divide up the dead man's possessions. He gave the tobacco to a woman of the dead man's household and his spears to a younger son. He gave half the skin of the sacrificed ox to the eldest son and he took the other half for himself as his right. The rest of Lam's possessions were tied in a bundle for future distribution among his wives and sons. The people then washed themselves. At a mortuary ceremony there is a feeling of pollution and the need to cleanse men and things. The dead man's goods were also washed. I left at this point, while the meat of the sacrifices was still being cooked.

The rites were concluded shortly after sunrise on the following morning. Two men stretched a goat on its back and a third, acting on behalf of Lam's eldest widow and the mother of his dead son Deng, cut it in two with a spear from throat to tail. Even the tail was carefully severed in twain and to complete the division the head was split in two with an axe. While the carcass was being halved in this way an old man and the senior widow pulled at it on one side and Lam's sons pulled at it on the other side till with laughter and cheering it fell apart. The old man and the senior widow ran with their half, the left or bad half, into the bush and threw it there, while the sons carried their half, the right or good half, to the hut outside which the sacrifice had been made. The old man carefully collected half the chyme of the goat and deposited it with the bad half in the bush. Lam's eldest son collected the other half and placed it with the good half of the goat. They express in this manner the departure of evil from the home, where people may now rest in peace. The left half which was carried away represents death and misfortune and the right half which was left in the home represents life and prosperity. Nuer say also that with the bad half go all the secret enmities between the dead and the living and any resentment and guilt there may have been between them. For example, one of the sons may have quarrelled with his father and his father may have

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765 nourished secret resentment in his heart, or a son may have had relations with one of his father's wives and not confessed his guilt. I was told that the bad half of the goat was eaten by persons unrelated to the dead man and the good half by members of his family.

765 768 Lam's goods which had been tied up for later distribution on the first day were now brought out again and divided among members of the family by the eldest son assisted by the master of ceremonies and some senior kinsmen. The clothes, beads, and ostrich-shell girdles were given to Lam's wives. His series of metal arm-rings was broken up and the rings distributed among the men and boys of the family.

765 The ceremonies were concluded by all the people shaving their heads. On this account the mortuary ceremony is often spoken of as the *mut*, the cutting. The cutting of the hair of the kin symbolizes the cutting off of the dead from the living just as in the marriage ceremonies the rite, known by the same word *mut*, by which the bride's hair is shaved off, symbolizes the cutting of the ties between her and her family and kin. The mortuary ceremony is one of deep 'silence and sadness', the marriage ceremony one of 'happiness and laughter'. They also say of the dead man *ca je mut*, he has been cut off (by this ceremony). It is clear from the orations and actions of the mortuary ceremony that part, perhaps the main part, of their purpose is to cut the dead from the living. 775 The dead man has to be given the full status of ghost and persuaded to accept it so that he will remain as a ghost and not try to 765 return to the living with the taint of death on him. This is the 761 constant refrain of the invocations: 'Now you ghosts, you are finished with us, you are the people of God, you are the people on the other side.'

That this is one of the main purposes of the ceremony is further shown by a curious observation I made in western Nuerland. There was living in a village there an unhappy-looking man of unkempt appearance, called Gatbuogh. This man had some years before gone on a distant journey and had not been heard of for a long time. Then there came to his village news of his death and in course of time the mortuary ceremony was held for him. He later returned home and was living in the village at the time of my visit. He was described as *joagh in tegh*, the living ghost. I was told *'ca tiede mut. ce tiede wa kene tie yang kel. ce te ni ringe*

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775 cunge', 'his soul was cut off. His soul went with the soul of the
765 (sacrificed) ox together. His flesh alone remains standing.' His
761 soul, the essential part of him, had gone and with it his social personality. Although people fed him he seems to have lost such privileges of kinship as pertain to the living and not to the dead. I was told that he could not partake of sacrificial meat because his agnatic kinship (*buth*) had been obliterated (*woc*) by the mortuary ceremony. A neighbour said to me 'he lives in our village with Baranyai but we do not count him a member of it because he is dead. The mortuary ceremony has been held for him.'

765 There were doubtless points I missed in the mortuary ceremony I witnessed and possibly some I did not hear about in later discussions with Nuer. A feature I did not observe but which, I was later told, is common, was the singing of hymns to the spirits of the air, in particular the hymn to *buk* which I have recorded earlier. These hymns are not an integral, and therefore essential, part of the ceremony and their meaning is in no way related to the matter in hand. They are in keeping, however, with the religious character of the rites and enhance it.

765 In conclusion I should say that Mayan told me at Dini that he
782 would later cut the ears of the bulls of his dead father's herd and that this is always done when the dead man was a person of age and social importance. The cattle would then prosper. For such a man another ox may be sacrificed some months later. The master of ceremonies again prepares porridge for those who gather to honour the ghost, and the senior kinsmen again make speeches to God and to the dead man and to all the ghosts of the lineage. Before the animal is speared all the people, men, women and children, bring ashes of cattle-dung and rub them on the ox. I discuss the meaning of this act in later chapters. The meat is distributed to all present, and also the porridge and the beer, which has been prepared in advance. An ox sacrificed in this manner to honour a dead man is known as *thak bar* or *thak joka*. A man may at any time decide to honour his father in this way and Nuer sometimes set apart an ox or an old bull (*tut jookni*) for their dead fathers, as Lam had done for his father Tutthiang, and await a suitable occasion for sacrificing it, as when they see their fathers in dreams and know that they want something. An ox so set apart cannot be disposed of but must be kept in the herd till it is sacrificed.

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ings is of general interest and not merely for those directly concerned in the rites. If it is at all a public occasion people, whether they are concerned in the matter or not, gather round to watch the meat being cut up and handed to those to whom it is due, and there is often much shouting and argument as the distribution is goodhumouredly disputed and men tug at the carcass and snatch or beg pieces of meat. Even outsiders who get in the way and beg persistently enough are likely to receive pieces of it. According to the circumstances those who on such an occasion receive meat take it to their homes, maybe in different villages, for cooking and eating, or it is cooked by women of the homestead in which the sacrifice took place and eaten there by groups, according to sex, age, and kinship. The meat is cooked, served, and eaten as would be that of a wild beast slaughtered in hunting. It is boiled, though tit-bits may be roasted in the embers of a fire. I want to make it clear indeed that the cutting up of the victim, the preparation of its flesh, and the eating of it are not parts of the sacrifice. To regard the eating of the animal as part of the sacrificial rite would be like regarding a wedding feast as part of the marriage service in our own country. But if it does not form part of the rite and has no sacramental significance it forms part of the whole ceremony in the broader sense and has a social significance. We have always to remember that a sacrifice, even piacular sacrifice, furnishes a feast and that in the circumstances in which Nuer live and by convention this means that neighbours are likely in one way or another to share in it.

IV

The ordinary Nuer sacrifice is carried out in the manner I have described—*pwot*, *buk*, *lam*, *nak* (*kam yang*), presentation, consecration, invocation, immolation. In some sacrifices, however, there are differences of order and procedure.

Mortuary ceremonies open with the slaughter of one or more beasts before sunrise, and as the invocations do not take place till later in the day they are not spoken over the victims as in other sacrifices. I do not think that this reversal of phases has in itself any special significance. Since the cattle have to be killed before the sun rises it is convenient to postpone the invocations, which are very lengthy on this occasion. Moreover, though in the mortuary

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782 765 ceremony which I witnessed the speakers of the invocations did not as they spoke walk up and down past tethered victims, as in normal sacrifices, they walked up and down past the dead man's possessions to which had been added the heads and hides of the slaughtered beasts; and I believe this to be the usual practice. As these heads and hides represented the victims it may be said that the invocations were said over them *post mortem*. What is of significance is rather the fact that the cattle must be slaughtered before the sun rises. The sacrifices concern death and the ghost of a dead man, so that the killing before sunrise is in accord with the association of east and light with life and of west and darkness with death. This part of the ceremony is for the dead man. The sacrifices are for him. Another sacrifice, which concludes the ceremonies, is for the release of the living. This explains also another difference, one of procedure.

It is understandable that on this occasion there is no formal presentation, for the beasts are killed at their habitual tethering-pegs in the kraal; but that there is also no consecration with ashes calls for comment. The explanation I would put forward, and which I discuss further in later chapters, is that the rubbing with ashes is, besides a consecration, an identification, at any rate in sacrifice which has a piacular meaning, of life of man with life of ox. Here sacrifice is for the dead. His soul, as we have seen earlier, goes to the abode of the ghosts with the souls of the cattle slaughtered at his mortuary ceremony. It is not for the living, so the living do not identify themselves with the victim in the usual manner.

There are some peculiar features in other sacrifices, apart from the supernumerary acts, such as libations, I have mentioned as sometimes accompanying the main rites, but they are only variations in the mode of slaughter or special acts performed after the sacrifice has been made.

782 In sacrifices in which the idea of separation is strong, as in cases of incest, to sever kinship, and in one of the mortuary rites, instead of the ox being speared and then skinned it is thrown on the ground and cut longitudinally in half, an operation known as *bak*. They begin the cutting by making an incision in the throat, so that the animal is soon dead, and they then cut towards the tail, slitting even that in two. Finally, they split the head in two with an axe. In other sacrifices in which the same idea is present the animal is speared, or its throat is slit, but instead of being skinned